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ABSTRACT

This study examines the curriculum, teaching practices, and evaluation methodologies used in destreamed classes in Ontario, Canada. In addition to reviewing the literature on mixed ability classes, results are reported from a questionnaire administered to 91 teachers from 18 sample secondary schools. Survey findings include: most respondents reported that teachers were responsible for and were designing destreamed curricula; 83 percent of respondents expected their students to achieve advanced level standards; 88 percent expected their students to achieve general level standards; and 41 percent of teachers felt they regularly received adequate support (e.g., textbooks, resource materials) for their destreamed courses, while 48 percent said they received support rarely or occasionally. Results concerning teaching and evaluation practices include: compared to streamed classes, destreamed class teachers used more varieties of teaching practices (e.g., group learning, individualized instruction); and student evaluation criteria which were being used more often in destreamed than streamed classes were effort and attitude, class participation, group work, projects, independent study units, and class assignments. Suggestions to improve destreamed classes and tips for new destreamed teachers are noted. (Contains 11 references.) (SW)

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An Investigation Into the Curriculum, Teaching Practices, and Evaluation Methods In Destreamed Classes

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Common Curriculum

Ontario Ministry of Education recently released a working document entitled *The Common Curriculum Grades 1-9* (1993a). It stresses student learning outcomes and integration with other subject areas. It contains 4 core program areas, 10 cross-curricular learning outcomes, with no levels of difficulty. There are two supporting documents: *Towards an Integrated Curriculum* and *Teaching Destreamed Grade 9 Classes* (1993bc).

Use a Variety of Teaching Methods in Destreamed Classes

The document *Teaching Destreamed Grade 9 Classes* (1993b) suggested that "a wide range of teaching strategies" to "help teachers accommodate a variety of student learning styles." It even suggested a good rule of thumb: "try to include in every learning situation opportunities for direct experience, reflection, instruction, and application." Strategies suggested include practical activities which are relevant to every day life and work; problem-solving situations; small-group learning; individual learning; whole class instruction; and work in co-operative small groups. The HM Inspectors from the DES (1978) also suggested a variety of teaching methods is needed in mixed ability classes.

Students With Special Needs

Students can be withdrawn to obtain help from Special Education teachers or attend remedial classes, or integrated into the regular classes in a model known as "In-class Resource Model". In integrated classes, these students were found to be well motivated and their achievement were markedly better (DES, 1978: 50). Also, resource teacher are encouraged to work alongside the class teacher in the classroom and some team-teaching may be desirable (Watson, 1985: 61). Oakes and Lipton (1992: 450) found that "Most parents of and advocates for learning-disabled students are eager to have them included in heterogeneous classrooms". They also suggested other programs: remedial programme, tutoring programs, and after-school help programs.

Student Assessment and Evaluation Principles

Teaching Destreamed Grade 9 Classes (1993c) suggested that "teachers need to use a wide variety of assessment, evaluation, and reporting strategies to accommodate the full range of students and their learning styles". Hargreaves and Earl (1990: 138) also concluded that "we are more likely to meet the range of assessment purposes ... by using a wide range of assessment strategies".

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To examine the curriculum, teaching practices, and evaluation methodologies in the destreamed classes.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

Two research methods were used: literature reviews and administration of questionnaire surveys. A number of studies were reviewed for this study. Some of these studies involve mixed ability classes in the U.K. in the early 1970s, detracked classes in the U.S. in the 1980s, and more recently, mixed ability classes in Australia. The major sources of data for this study were obtained from the Questionnaire for Teachers of Destreamed Classes completed by 94 teachers from 18 sample secondary schools in May 1992. 91 questionnaires were usable.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

These are the general results. For certain questions, results are available in eight subject areas.

Curriculum Planning

1. Most respondents reported that teachers were responsible for and they were actually designing the destreamed curriculum. 90% of the respondents said they used the present Ministry Guidelines for instructional objectives.

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2. On the average, 83% of the respondents expect that their students will be able to achieve advanced level standards. 88% of the respondents expect that their students will be able to achieve general level standards.
3. 41% of the respondent teachers said they received adequate support (e.g., textbooks, resource materials, etc.) for their destreamed courses regularly. 48% of the teachers said they received support rarely or occasionally.
4. In order for students to "pass" their destreamed courses, respondent teachers were asked what the expected minimal level of competence and expectation are.

Teaching Practices

5. When compared with streamed classes, teachers used more varieties of teaching practices (group learning, individualized instruction, etc.) in destreamed classes. Whole class instruction was the only teaching practice that was being used significantly less by the 57% of the respondent teachers. (See Table 1)
6. When compared with streamed classes, about one-third of the respondent teachers felt that they had more instructional time than before. 62% of the respondent teachers' classes had more student-centred activities. Teachers said that more students are speaking aloud in their classes.
7. There is a high percentage of collaborations among the respondent teachers and they integrate more with other subject areas.
8. The overall mean class size of the sample destreamed class is 20.48. The desirable class sizes ranged from 16.2 (technical studies) to 21.2 (mathematics). The overall desirable mean class size is 19.
9. Respondent teachers were divided on the issue of how above average and below-average students were served by destreamed classes. However, they are more positive on the issue of how average students were served by destreamed classes.
10. The provisions made for "more advanced" students were they were either given more work (enriched or otherwise), they helped others in class, or no provisions were provided.
11. The "weaker" students in the destreamed classes in this study were given "extra help". Some had their curriculum and evaluation modified by their teachers to help them pass.
12. Almost all respondent teachers had Students with Special Needs in their destreamed classes. Most of them made provisions for these students such as partial withdrawal, in-class resource model, and "extra help". Some students had their curriculum and evaluation modified by their teachers.

TABLE 1

COMPARING TEACHING PRACTICES WITH STREAMED COURSES

TEACHING PRACTICES	LESS	SAME	MORE
Small Group Learning	6%	36%	50%
Co-operative Group Learning	4%	25%	65%
Individualized Instruction	16%	34%	47%
Instruction to Whole Class	57%	34%	3%
Instruction to Small Groups	12%	38%	44%
Independent Study	21%	28%	38%
Peer Tutoring	7%	23%	56%
Individual Projects	16%	37%	37%
Group Projects	13%	38%	33%
Audio-Visual Tapes/Films	14%	59%	21%
Research/Experiment	14%	39%	22%
Games/Hands-On Exercises	8%	38%	46%

Student Evaluation Methods

13. Respondent teachers were using a variety of student evaluation methods. In general, when compared with streamed classes, the following student evaluation methods are being used more by respondent teachers in their destreamed classes: (in order of

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frequency), effort and attitude, class participation, group work, projects, independent study units, and class assignments. Attendance, tests, and quizzes are student evaluation methods that are being used significantly less by the respondent teachers.

14. 59% of the respondents used more than twenty assessments to determine the student's final mark. The difference between weighting schemes between destreamed classes and streamed classes is not very large. In an average destreamed course, weighting for tests and quizzes was 24%, for examinations was 16%, for effort and participation was 12%, for assignments and homework was 24%, for independent study unit and projects was 15%, and for group work was 7%.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS FOR DESTREAMED CLASSES

(Number in bracket is the number of respondents)

1. Revise/Modify curriculum for regular class, activities for building group skills, integration with other subjects, students at either end of the spectrum, and materials needed for "advanced" students. (18)
2. More time is needed for curriculum planning (9)
3. Improve/add/maintain varieties of teaching strategies, e.g. co-operative group learning, team teaching, etc.(18)
4. More in-service programs on destreaming be made available, e.g. co-operative group learning, classroom management strategies, teaching strategies, etc. (12)
5. Need new/update evaluation policy to include a system for student evaluation methods, marks for effort, motivation and attitude, and making it less complicated. (15)

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW DESTREAMED TEACHERS

1. Be flexible & patient, work into destreaming gradually (10)
2. A lot of work is required but they are enjoyable work.(3)
3. Have enrichment materials for stronger students (3)
4. Collaboration between teachers is important, especially other teachers of the same subject. (5)
5. Divide class into groups (4)
6. Have a variety of strategies including co-operative group learning. (4)
7. Visit other destreaming models (5) but create your own based on teacher readiness and student needs.
8. Attend workshops on co-operative group learning (4)

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